

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 1128

E.O.: 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, BY

SUBJ: ACTIVITIES OF NEW BURUNDI REGIME AFTER FIRST FIVE
WEEKS

1. SUMMARY. THE NEW GABAZA REGIME IS MAINTAINING ITS IMAGE OF PURPOSEFULNESS AND OF PROMINENT AND CONCENTRATED ATTENTION TO THE WORST ILLS OF BURUNDI - HUNGER, JOBLESSNESS, AND RURAL NON-DEVELOPMENT. IT HAS ALSO ADVERTIZED ITS SERIOUSNESS ABOUT FIGHTING CORRUPTION BY EXPELLING A DOZEN FOREIGNERS IMPLICATED IN SHADY PAST PRACTICES. THIS SEEMS TO BE ONE MANIFESTATION OF A CERTAIN ANTI-FOREIGNER TENDENCY, WHICH IS MOST EVIDENT IN ATTEMPTS TO REPLACE FOREIGN NATIONALS (INCLUDING FOREIGN AFRICANS) WITH BURUNDIAN WORKERS AND EXPERTS. HOWEVER, IT ALSO SHOWS UP IN A TREND TO DEAL MORE DEMANDINGLY, THUS FAR, WITH FOREIGN AID MISSIONS. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE PRESIDENT BAGAZA'S FRANK AND WIDE-RANGING BASIC POLICY SPEECH OF NOVEMBER 21 (BUJUMBURA 1070), LOCAL MEDIA HAVE CONTINUED TO PUBLISH REVEALING REPORTS OF THE STATE OF DILAPIDATION OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY AND, IN PARTICULAR, OF THE LOOMING THREAT OF NATIONWIDE HUNGER. ALL THE NEW MINISTERS IN THE ECONOMIC FIELD ARE WORKING TO REVISE THE ORGANIZATION OF THEIR DEPARTMENTS, THEIR OPERATING METHODS, THEIR PRIORITIES, AND, IN SOME CASES, THEIR PROGRAMS. THE PLANNING MINISTRY
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HAS BEEN ESPECIALLY ACTIVE IN OVERALL COORDINATION, WHICH WILL

BE FACILITATED BY A NEW INTERMINISTERIAL COMMITTEE IN THIS SECTOR. NATIONAL HOLIDAYS HAVE BEEN CUT FROM 13 TO 8 PER YEAR, AND WORKING HOURS RAISED TO 45 PER WEEK. WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT IS THAT ATTENDANCE ON THE JOB IS BEING QUITE STRICTLY ENFORCED IN GOVERNMENT OFFICES. TENDENCIES TO A PERSONALITY CULT OF BAGAZA ARE, SO FAR, BEING EXPLICITLY DISCOURAGED. INSTEAD, A REAL EFFORT TO INSTILL PATRIOTISM, COMMUNITY SPIRIT, AND MORE MODEST LIVING STANDARDS (FOR THE ELITE) IS UNDERWAY.

3. THERE IS CLEARLY AN INCLINATION TO A BIT OF CHAUVINISM, WHICH HOLDS THAT BURUNDIANS SHOULD BE FAVORED OVER FOREIGNERS IN ALL RESPECTS AND THAT FOREIGNERS ARE NOT ONLY SOMEWHAT SUSPECT FOR PAST ACTIONS, BUT REMAIN HERE ONLY AT REGIME SUFFERANCE. THUS, A JUST PROMULGATED DECREE FORBIDS DIRECT HIRING BY ALL PUBLIC OR PRIVATE EMPLOYERS IN BURUNDI; INSTEAD, THE LABOR DEPARTMENT (OBVIOUSLY ILL-EQUIPPED FOR SUCH LARGE SCALE WORK) IS TO REGISTER ALL JOB-SEEKERS AND DOLE OUT WORKERS TO EMPLOYERS WITH VACANCIES, WITH THE IMPLICIT AIM OF GIVING NATIVES TOP PREFERENCE. THE IMMEDIATE OBJECT OF THIS IS THE MASS OF ZAIRIAN AND RWANDESE (TUTSI) WORKERS IN BUJUMBURA, BUT IT WILL ALSO EXTEND TO EXPATRIATE PERSONNEL IN EUROPEAN-LEVEL POSITIONS. INDEED, CERTAIN DEMANDS ARE ALSO BEING MADE ON FOREIGN AID MISSIONS HERE TO REPLACE FOREIGN EXPERTS WITH BURUNDIAN EXPERTS ON VARIOUS PROJECTS, REGARDLESS OF COMPARABILITY OF EXPERIENCE AND QUALIFICATIONS. WESTERN MISSIONS SENSE A MORE DEMANDING ATTITUDE ON AID, AND THE HEALTH MINISTER GAVE ME TO UNDERSTAND DECEMBER 7 THAT THE OLD REGIME'S COMMITMENTS ON FUTURE AID PROJECTS (INCLUDING AMERICAN PLANS IN MUYINGA PROVINCE) ARE ALL SUBJECT TO RE-EXAMINATION. (I WILL CHECK THIS OUT WITH THE AGRICULTURAL MINISTER ON DECEMBER 9).

4. THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION SEEMS MOSTLY TO BE IN PROGRESS BEHIND THE SCENES, BUT THERE ARE A FEW PUBLIC SIGNS. INVESTIGATIONS ARE GOING FORWARD OF A NUMBER OF PAST SHADY DEALS INVOLVING OFFICIALS AND PERSONALITIES CLOSE TO THE OLD REGIME, AND AT LEAST ONE, BANKER PASCAL KASHIRAHAMWE, ARRANGER OF BUSINESS AFFAIRS FOR MICOMBERO, SEEMS DESTINED FOR TRIAL. NON-PAYMENT OF TAXES IS BEING CAREFULLY SCRUTINIZED. THERE IS NO GENERAL CALL FOR VENGEANCE AGAINST THE OLD ELITE: IN FACT, THE NEW OFFICIALS PRIDE THEMSELVES ON AN AFRICAN COUP D'ETAT

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WHICH FOCUSES ON THE FUTURE RATHER THAN ON SMEARING THOSE DEPOSED. RUMOR HAS IT THAT THE FORMER CHIEF OF STAFF WILL SOON BE RELEASED FROM HOUSE ARREST, AND MICOMBERO IS NOT MENTIONED AT ALL. FORMER INTERIOR MINISTER RWURI SEEMS THE ONE OFFICIAL MOST LIKELY TO BE PUT ON TRIAL, THROUGH PRESUMABLY FOR FINANCIAL CRIMES.

5. THE MOST SPECTACULAR ACT OF THE NEW REGIME THUS FAR WAS THE

SERVICE OF EXPULSION NOTICES DECEMBER 4 ON 14 FOREIGNERS, OF WHOME SIX WERE BELGIAN, TWO SWISS, TWO GREEK, TWO SENEGALESE, ONE YEMENI, AND ONE PORTUGUESE. ALL WERE PUT ABOARD SABENA ON THE MORNING OF DECEMBER 6, DESPITE PLEAS BY VARIOUS EMBASSIES THAT THEY GET MORE TIME. PROPERTY WAS NOT CONFISCATED, BUT ASSETS ARE BLOCKED PENDING INVESTIGATIONS. MOST OF THESE PEOPLE HAD VERY QUESTIONABLE BUSINESS RECORDS, AND WERE KNOWN FOR CORRUPTION, CURRENCY DEALINGS, DRUG TRAFFIC, OR OTHER MISDEEDS. HOWEVER, ONE WAS A LONG-TIME BELGIAN AGRICULTURAL EXPERT, AGAINST WHOM THERE WERE NO CHARGES OF THIS NATURE, BUT WHOSE PROFESSIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND STYLE NO LONGER PLEASED THE NEW RULERS. THIS PEREMPTORY OUSTER OF A RESPECTED FOREIGN EXPERT (HERE UNDER OFFICIAL BELGIAN AUSPICES) HAS MUCH AROUSED MY WESTERN COLLEAGUES AND ME, AND IT IS REPORTED THAT OUR STRONG REACTION HAS CAUSED BAGAZA PERSONALLY TO REFLECT UPON THE WISDOM OF THIS ACTION. FORTUNATELY, THE NOTIFICATION TO UNDP THAT THE LONG-TIME HEAD (ALSO BELGIAN) OF THE MINERALS EXPLORATION TEAM MUST ALSO LEAVE BURUNDI IS NOT ACCOMPANIED BY ANY ABRUPT DEADLINE.

6. COMMENT: I STILL CONSIDER THE NEW REGIME TO BE RELATIVELY HIGH-MINDED, WELL INTENTIONED, AND PATRIOTIC. HOWEVER, THEIR INEXPERIENCE AND ZEAL ARE ALREADY LEADING TO SOME MISTAKES, PARTICULARLY IN THE IMAGE WHICH THEY ARE BUILDING FOR THEMSELVES ABROAD. WHILE WANTING LESS AUTHORITARIANISM IN PUBLIC LIFE AND SOCIETY, THEIR SOMEWHAT SIMPLISTIC HOUSECLEANING INSTINCTS AND DO-GOODISM ARE LEADING THEM TO GREATER CONTROLS AND GREATER PRESSURES ON INDIVIDUALS. THEIR CONSIDERABLE BITTERNESS AT WHAT THEY FEEL TO BE PAST EXPLOITATION OF BURUNDI BY EUROPEANS (WITH MICOMBERO'S CONNIVANCE, TO BE SURE) IS ALLOWING A (SO FAR) MILD REINFORCEMENT OF LONG-STANDING SUBSURFACE XENOPHOBIC TENDENCIES. FORTUNATELY, THE LEADERSHIP IS VERY SENSITIVE TO THE CURRENTS OF ONLY SLIGHTLY MUTED PUBLIC AND CONFIDENTIAL

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FOREIGN OPINION, AND IT DOES POST-MORTEM ON ITS ACTS. SOME JUDICIOUS ADVICE AND INFORMAL COMMENT BY DIPLOMATS MAY PROVE USEFUL TO GET THE REGIME OVER ROUGH SPOTS.
MARK

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